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ABSTRACT

Concentrating on her domestic and foreign news stories of the 1930s, a study analyzed the news reporting of American novelist Josephine Herbst. Although the study focused on Herbst's reporting from Cuba and Germany, other writings were examined, including several fictional pieces, memoirs, and literary criticism. Herbst's work was analyzed according to several criteria. Each piece was reviewed for its stylistic characteristics--language usage, narrative form, source use and balance, and readability. Background material on the thirties provides context not only for Herbst's politics, experiences, and social views, but also for her writing style and genre choices. Analysis revealed that Herbst's choice of topics was motivated by her Marxist politics. Analysis also showed that Herbst's writing has been overlooked in journalism history, and although her sex and politics may be enough to generate renewed interest in her, the justification for consideration of her work rests on its ability to capture a sense of time and people otherwise lost in "missing moments" of history. (A two-page selected bibliography of primary and secondary source material by Josephine Herbst is appended.) (MM)

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EYEWITNESS TO MISSING MOMENTS: THE FOREIGN REPORTING OF JOSEPHINE HERBST

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INTRODUCTION

In the thirties American novelist Josephine Herbst took time out from her fiction to report on domestic and foreign news stories. Writing only about issues that engaged her concern, she covered everything from farm conditions at home, to the Cuban general strike and German resistance to Hitler in 1935. Her last reporting was done on the front lines of the International Brigade in Spain in 1937. This paper reviews that foreign reporting, its goal to address omissions in journalism history that overlooks her contributions. Herbst's fascination with the forces of history drove her to journalism over stories which provide a record. While her sex and politics may be enough to generate renewed interest in her, the justification for consideration of her work rests on its ability to capture a sense of times and people otherwise lost in "missing moments" of history.

A friend and contemporary of Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and other well-known literary figures of the period, Herbst was both an intrepid reporter and respected writer. Nonetheless, she and other radical women journalists from the thirties are absent from journalism histories.[1] This lack of

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[1] The books which do not mention them include: Maurine Beasley and Sheila Silver, Women in Media: A Documentary Source Book (Washington Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 1977); Barbara Belford, Brilliant Bylines: A Biographical Anthology of Notable Newspaperwomen in America (New York: Columbia University, 1986); Marion Marzholf, Up From the

attention exists in spite of the fact that "they rode mules through revolutionary Cuba, shared trenches with troops in the Spanish Civil War and interviewed sea captains in the Soviet Arctic."[2] Even where their names appear, their work is not analyzed or critiqued.[3] In Writing Red, an anthology of American women writers from the thirties, Nekola notes:

> To judge from the texts available, women journalists at present occupy a marginal position in the history of radical journalism, and radical journalists occupy a marginal position in the history of women journalists.[4]

LITERATURE REVIEW

The most extensive work on Herbst is Langer's authoritative biography, published in the early eighties.[5] Integrating all parts of her life, Langer does not focus critically on either her journalism or her fiction. It is an invaluable reference, both for the context it offers as well as for the corrections it offers for the misinformation about Herbst that persisted in earlier writings.[6]

Footnote: A History of Women Journalists (New York: Hastings House. 1977); Madelon Golden Schlipp and Sharon M. Murphy, Great Women of the Press (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University, 1983).

[2] Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz, eds., Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940 (New York: The Feminist Press, 1987), 189-190.

[3] Ibid.; no biographical sources dealing with journalists could be found which included mention of Herbst.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Elinor Langer, Josephine Herbst: The Story She Could Never Tell (New York: Warner Books, 1984).

[6] Langer, Herbst, 5-8.

A study of Herbst's work published several years later picks up where the Langer book left off, but focusing on her literary work.[7] It mentions her journalism only in a brief, descriptive summary of her non-fiction efforts. The only piece addressed specifically to Herbst's journalism is a 1978 University of Iowa master's thesis, which looked at her social and political reporting but suffered from several critical problems, including the familiar factual inaccuracies stemming from misinformation that originated with Herbst herself.[8] The author failed to maintain a dispassionate distance from his subject and her political involvements, and as a result gave her both too much credit and too little. The paper's causal inferences endow Herbst with superhuman historical foresight.[9] At the same time, her very real powers of observation evident from childhood, were credited to an adult political affiliation, which she in the end never officially nor completely embraced.[10]

One scholarly article reviewed Herbst's trilogy of novels about an American family's experiences from the Civil War through the Depression, while a magazine article looked at one of her love affairs.[11] Some of her work has been included in

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[7] Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua, Josephine Herbst (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985).

[8] Robert L. Craig, "The Social and Political Journalism of Josephine Herbst," M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1978.

[9] Ibid., 75.

[10] Ibid.; Langer, Herbst, 130-131, 225-227, 204-205; and, Fred B. Millett, Contemporary American Authors, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), 389.

[11] Elinor Langer, "Love Among the Literati." Ms., July 1984, 41-44; Walter B. Rideout, "Forgotten Images of the Thirties: Josephine Herbst," The Literary Review 27 (Fall 1983), 28-36.

several anthologies of writing of the period, the most recent being the Nekola's Writing Red. Herbst is ignored by the various collections of journalism biographical material, though she can be found in similar works on American radicals and novelists.

Frequently cited in works about American culture and literature written in the thirties and forties, her name shows up again only in the seventies and eighties, when interest in the thirties revived.[12] To a slight extent some of the neglect may have been of her own doing. Herbst refused to have her work included in a sixties anthology on proletarian literature because she saw the label as narrow and arbitrary.[13]

METHODOLOGY

While the study concentrated on an analysis of Herbst's reporting from Cuba and Germany, though her other writing was not ignored. Several of her fictional pieces offered valuable insights on her reporting and political experiences and philosophies. Her memoirs and literary criticism were reviewed where they dealt with relevant periods and topics. Herbst's work was analyzed according to several criteria. Each piece was reviewed for its stylistic characteristics-- including language

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[12]Millett, Contemporary Authors; William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Warren I. Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Nekola, Writing Red.

[13]Bevilacqua, Herbst, 126.

usage, narrative form, source use and balance, and readability. references.

Background material on the thirties provided context not only for Herbst's politics, experiences, and social views, but also for her writing style and genre choices. Such context was particularly important in light of the distinctive political and intellectual climate of the thirties. Because studies of the period have dealt largely with male radicals and male perspectives, effort was made to distinguish where bias might have resulted.

Issues of fact are a critical consideration when dealing with Herbst's work. In keeping with her period and documentary style, Herbst's writing was concerned was with large social problems. Stott has suggested that preoccupation with broad truths often resulted in less regard for than smaller truths.[14] Especially in her accounts of her own life, Herbst was not always completely factual. Her New York Times obituary and much of the biographical material about prior to Langer cite a birth date she circulated, which is five years later than her real birth. The obituary also included a doctored wedding date and reporting credits she could not claim.[15]

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[14]William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 12-14.

[15]"Josephine Herbst, Novelist and Social-Political Reporter, Dead," The New York Times, 29 January 1969; and, Langer, Herbst, 375.

BACKGROUND

Born in 1892, not 1897, Herbst grew up in Sioux City, Iowa. One of four daughters of transplanted Pennsylvanians, she was raised on stories of her mother's family and weaned on the notion that her sex was no barrier to accomplishment. An avid reader, she lived in a close-knit world dominated by her mother, a world in which education and ideas were both an end in themselves and a an entree to a wider world. After high school she started her studies at Morningside College in Sioux City. Taking time off to earn money, she moved on first to the University of Iowa, then to the University of Washington, and finally the University of California at Berkeley, where she graduated in 1917.

Herbst discovered her radical leanings in California and explored them after she moved to New York, where she traveled in the radical literary circles in Greenwich Village. Early in the twenties Herbst went to Europe. She lived for a time in both Germany and Italy, before she moved on to Paris where the expatriate circles brought her in contact with Hemingway and Dos Passos. It was also in Paris that she met and moved in with John Herrmann, an aspiring writing from Lansing, Michigan.

Herbst and Herrmann lived in Europe for a spell and then returned to the States where they eventually married under pressure from his well-to-do parents. They wrote and eked out a living doing whatever they had to when they could not earn enough writing. Eventually Herrmann became a member of the Communist Party, first organizing farmers near their home in

Pennsylvania, and later working in Washington for a Communist front. Though the marriage survived their poverty, his drinking and her affair with another woman eventually strained it beyond repair.

Herbst's reporting trip to Cuba in 1935 coincided with the end of the marriage, though the divorce did not come until five years later. The agony she felt over the dissolution of the relationship figures in both of the fictional pieces she wrote about her Cuban experience.

Herbst's interest in reporting grew out of a whimsical trip she and Herrmann made to the USSR to observe the International Congress of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov in 1930.[16] At that stage, neither of the pair were members of the Communist party nor of its literary wing, the John Reed Club. And, they had no money. To make the trip, they sold their valuable first editions and a Hemingway manuscript given them by the author. They began the trip with nothing more than $700 and a note from John Dos Passos to his publisher in Moscow giving them access to $250 worth of whatever rubles he had in his royalty account there.[17]

Whim or not, it was an important trip for Herbst. What she found in the Soviet Union was both confusing and moving. She came away strongly affected by her experience and ready "to confront contemporary history actively and honestly by carrying out with determination and competence the duties of a reporter."[18] It was

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[16] Langer, Herbst, 127-128.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Bevilacqua, Herbst, 104.

a mission she pursued for the next seven years. Always on special assignment, she wrote for both mainstream and left wing radical publications.[19]

Herbst's journalistic efforts ended in Spain, where she again felt she was confronting history in the making. This time she was overwhelmed by the complexity and magnitude of the forces at work.[20] Returning to the United States, she turned away from journalism, and focused first on fiction and later on her memoirs. In each genre, however, she returned to the subjects and experiences that occupied her as a journalist.

Beginning her journalistic efforts after Kharkov or ending them in the ruins of the Loyalist resistance, Herbst held fast to the fruit of her own critical faculties. She distrusted dogmatism and was incapable of blind obedience to any creed. Though she was a product of her times and argued that a writer should be concerned with social issues, she also felt strongly that it was a writer's job to remain detached and analytical.[21] She drew inspiration from Marxism and radical theories of history, economics, and literature, but she never joined the party or toed the party line.

The writing of the thirties cannot be taken separately from the politics. It was the purpose of expression that was meant to

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[19] Among others, Herbst wrote for Nation, American Mercury, New Masses, the New York Post, Scribner's Magazine, New Republic, and Woman's Day.

[20] Josephine Herbst, "The Starched Blue Sky of Spain." The Noble Savage 1 (March 1960), 76-117.

[21] Bevilacqua, Herbst, 12.

guide its form. From the other side of the Cold War and McCarthy's anti-communist "witch hunts," it is important to grasp the role radical writers played in society in the thirties. They were not members of furtive underground, but rather were the admired, forward thinking intellectuals of their day. Herbst, Hemingway, and the others of their circle published anywhere they could. Their work was as likely to show up in Scribner's Magazine as in Nation or New Masses. Their work was respected and published.

By the early thirties the rips and tears created in the nation's social fabric by the Great Depression indicated to many that radical change was needed in the United States. For those who already were inclined to radical politics, like Herbst, the Soviet experiment could not help but hold attraction. For the less politically inclined, the Communists held the fascination of any new fad. Where establishment capitalism looked askance at writers and intellectuals, the American Communist Party made a point of welcoming them and providing them with a purpose.[22] Many, like Herbst never formally joined the party, but nonetheless saw as inevitable class conflict and the collapse of capitalism. If the artists and writers were not hungry themselves, they saw families and friends unemployed and exposed to emotional and physical dislocation.

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[22] Warren I. Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 172-173.

Communism and radical politics offered hope. No one should be above the struggle, and writers and artists had the power to expose the inequities and the ills of society. Susman suggests that the story of the thirties was not so much one of politics, but one of innocence and a longing to belong.[23] Naive, the radicals were convinced that once the truth were known change would have to follow--America was built on equity and equal opportunity. The revelations of the totalitarian realities of Stalinism were years away, and the internecine fighting of the factions in Spain was unimaginable. For some like Herbst and Dos Passos the thirties ended in Spain, where they lost hope for the fight. For others, like Hemingway, the Spanish fight was still noble, but for most the end would come either in 1939 with the Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact or with the looming reality of the war.[24]

When the tide turned, many of the former radicals recanted, but not Herbst. She abandoned the radical fiction and activism, but maintained her leftist outlook. Disillusioned with some of the tenets of her earlier beliefs, she stood by her conviction that the radical movement of the thirties should be judged in context of its times:

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[23] Ibid, 174.

[24] Louis Filler, Crusaders For American Liberalism (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1964), 386-387.

> Convinced that she had responded in good faith and as honestly as she had been able to the forces of history, she saw no reason to feel guilty about her behavior or her advocacy of radical and liberal causes once subsequent events made history evolve in a way that she had not foreseen.[25]

Perhaps it is in that failure to recant that Herbst condemned herself to literary oblivion.[26]

Like many of her contemporaries, Herbst worked in a variety of literary forms, suiting her style and form to her literary need. The driving force behind her journalism was the need to capture what she "felt through her skin," to communicate it to others as a vehicle for social change.[27] In that she was not alone.

"Artists and writers worked in every media, using a variety of stylistic and formal techniques, but they shared an urge to document, to record, to report, and, ultimately, to change the world in much of their work during the 1930s."[28]
Labeling the form social documentary, Stott suggested that its common theme "show[ed] man at grips with conditions neither permanent or necessary, conditions of a certain time and place."[29]

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[25]Bevilacqua, Herbst, 101.

[26]Rideout, "Forgotten Images," 29; and, Langer, Herbst, 8-15.

[27]Fred Millett, Contemporary American Authors, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), 389; and, Nekola, Writing Red, 195.

[28]Nekola, Writing Red, 1.

[29]William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 20.

Thirties documentary "reportage" dealt with many of the same topics as the fiction--revolutions, strikes, labor conditions, poverty, and unemployment. Like the fiction equivalent, the goal was to relay the truth of about the plight of a larger group through the story of an individual.[30] As Nekola explains:

> It was the ideal form of writing for revolutionary and proletarian aesthetic: it was "true," without the distortions or excess of bourgeois individualistic fiction: it used the individual in the service of the mass; it raised political consciousness by linking one person with larger political movements; it replaced private despair with mass action.[31]

Thirties media output of all types placed a premium on experience.[32] And documentary reportage was no exception. To make its point, the technique stressed the eyewitness experience of the conditions at issue--the reporter's first person assertion, "I was there."[33]

The narrator's personal reaction served two purposes, it lent credibility to the story and sought to strike an emotional response in the reader. As a result, the narrator's reaction tended to be exaggerated.[34] In many ways, thirties writing was a successor to the Muckrakers and the precursor of the "new journalism" and "advocacy journalism" of the sixties and seventies.

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[30] Stott, Documentary Expression, 54.
[31] Nekola, Writing Red, 194.
[32] Stott, Documentary Expression, 38.
[33] Ibid, 38; and Nekola, Writing Red, 195.
[34] Stott, Documentary Expression, 44-45.

HERBST'S JOURNALISM

In January 1935 Herbst went to cover conditions in Cuba. Carrying accreditation from politically moderate publications, her announced intention was to write about the state of the Cuban sugar industry. Her real mission was to meet with members of the revolutionary underground for the communist magazine New Masses.[35] The timing of her visit was prompted by talk of a popular strike, the third in as many years. Waiting weeks for contact with the underground, Herbst wholeheartedly pursued the conventional interviews that provided her cover. The evidence lies in the wealth of detail in the series of stories from the trip which ran in New Masses.[36]

Herbst travelled to Realengo 18, a mountainous outpost seized and held by peasant soldiers in a land dispute with the government and big landowners. She also interviewed Fulgencio Batista, then the military force behind the Cuban dictator. Later he would become dictator himself. Accounts of both experiences are found in her articles and her stories.

When Herbst returned from Cuba late in March 1935 her personal life was in shambles. She and Herrmann were separated, she was broke, and there was little prospect of work in New York. Life in the radical circles seemed pale after Cuba. Longing to

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[35] Langer, Herbst, 181-182.

[36] Josephine Herbst, "A Passport from Realengo 18," New Masses 16 (16 July 1935), 10-11; "Cuba--Sick For Freedom," New Masses 15 (2 April 1935), 17-18; and, "The Soviet in Cuba," New Masses 14 (19 March 1935), 9-12.

return to Germany to investigate the resistance to Hitler, Herbst negotiated a special assignment from the New York Post and left for Europe.

The result of her trip was "Behind the Swastika," a series that ran on the front page of the paper's second section for six consecutive days at the end of October 1935. The editor's note that ran at the top of each double-column, page-length installment identified Herbst as a "well-known American novelist and newspaper woman." It noted that she had returned to Germany after an absence of several years, and explained:

> In this series of articles she interprets the New Germany and compares it with the Fatherland she knew so well before Hitler.
>
> She is probably the only American newspaper woman who not only has won the confidence of the underground opposition in Germany but who also interviewed Nazi leaders in Berlin.[37]

The paper's editors may have engaged in some degree of hyperbole in their introduction, but the result was worth touting.

The German and Cuban stories share a clean, powerful style. Whether in the left-wing New Masses or mainstream Post, Herbst let her story tell itself. She did not resort to cliches or slogans. If her politics informed her choice of stories to report, they did not color the product. One of the most striking things about both series is the amount of detail woven into each story and the meticulous, exhaustive reporting that would have been necessary to produce them.

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[37] "Behind the Swastika," New York Post, 28 October 1935, sec. 2, p 1.

Herbst consistently uses the first and second person pronouns--the "I"s and "you"s--characteristic of her time and style, but less familiar to modern readers. Like modern writers, however, she used a simple style of writing for both her fiction and non-fiction. Possibly as an outgrowth of her early respect for Hemingway's work, she intentionally avoided language which gave import to the individual words or phrases.[38] The pictures the words painted were the message, not the words themselves.

Reading her stories it is easy to lose sense of time and place and forget that 50 years have passed since she wrote her copy. In "The Soviet in Cuba" she described returning to Havana after a spell in the remote mountains to find the city in the grip of a general strike:

> I came down from the mountains of "Realengo 18" ten days ago. When I went there, five days before, people were saying that strikes were impossible in Cuba, outlawed by Mendieta's decrees. A decree making death the penalty for sabotage in the sugar-cane fields and mills had been put in force just before the season of harvesting and grinding cane began. One third of a million teachers and students have been on strike for nearly three weeks. Machado, the great outlawer of strikes fell by one, and today Mendieta's government seems to be trembling as a new general strike slowly but surely gains momentum. Last night soldiers took possession of the university. Flocks of leaflets moved like quicksilver through the streets. Employes [sic] from the public service broadcasted their manifesto stating their demands, calling for a broad united front of all groups against military dictatorship, against imperialism.[39]

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[38] Bevilacqua, Herbst, 15. Reporters who had to transmit their stories over telegraph and cable lines fell back on simple style. And, Stephen Kern suggests that Hemingways's simplification of the English language was in part a consepquence of his experience as a foreign correspondent. The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 115.

[39] The Soviet in Cuba," New Masses, 19 March 1935, 9.

One of the most fascinating pictures she paints from the Cuban visit is a portrait of her interview with Batista, from the same issue of New Masses. It is, arguably, a measure of her detachment that her account of the meeting paints him as an attractive, forceful man, rather than the political enemy of everything she cared about:

> Last night, at half past eight, I went to Camp Columbia to see Batista. Soldiers at two gates barred the way, but inside the building itself a curious, homey atmosphere prevailed. A radio was playing, interestingly enough, a popular Cuban version of one of the revolutionary songs that Pancho Villa's men sang as they roared over the hills toward Mexico City. A colored painting of two hand clasped, and the name of Batista's birthplace, Oriente, 24 Feb. 1895, and of Camp Columbia, 4 Sept., Havana, 1933, celebrates the Colonel's promotion in 1933. . . . [Batista] is a powerful, handsome man, and so quick, so sharp that he relishes danger. He begins to talk, speaking slowly and repeating the one thing I must get clear: that they will stop at nothing to prevent a general strike. At nothing, if necessary.[40]

The account of the Batista interview is a good example of Herbst's unobtrusive use of the first person. "Cuba Sick for Freedom" from April 2, also had a subtle narrative presence:

> At this moment the streets are empty at night, the nine o'clock curfew can strike death if defied. The student running the elevator in my hotel has a serious face. He was smiling a little when the strike began. Many people of a neutral bent were not sure of themselves but a few nights of terror have set their beliefs. . . . The unafraid are the really desperate, who have nothing to lose. But if one reads the papers, all government- censored, Mendieta has broken the strike and the government was never so strong.[41]

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[40] Ibid., 12. It is interesting to know that this article containes a facutal inaccuracy that may have rested with Batista and not with Herbst. While the wall painting, she desribes lists his brith years as 1895, the year generally quoted by encylcopedias and dictionaries is 1901.

[41] "Cuba Sick For Freedom," New Masses, 2 April 1935, 17.

If the writing from Cuba is strong, the work from Germany is stronger. Where the Cuban stories were choppy and sometimes included explicit political commentary, the German stories are almost hypnotically smooth. The first story in the German series was a good example of her style. The story was haunting, but the words were simple:

> Seven workers were shot against a wall at Bismark, Germany, to stop a strike in July. A few weeks later 15,000 textile workers dared to strike at Augsburg. Yet no strike news comes out in the German press.
>
> The newspaper, the radio and the newsreel repeat that all is quiet in Germany, everything is in order. To the eye, streets are clean, window boxes are choked with flowers, children hike to the country in droves, singing songs. The slogans of opposition groups have been whitewashed from walls.
>
> Only by word of mouth, in whispers, the real news circulates stealthily through the German world. From hand to hand tiny leaflets inform the uninformed.
>
> A worker tells me about the Bismark strike in the secrecy of his home. It is in an apartment house where the doors are plastered with the different stickers of Nazi activities to show that the occupants have made their contributions. Within, we speak in lowered voices. The radio is turned on loudly and we sit near it with our heads close together. The walls have ears.[42]

Her story from November 1, described the atmosphere of a packed rally in the Berlin Sportpalast:

> Curiosity to see Herr Streicher was as responsible for the crowd as any other reasons. The audience warmed to his rough and ready appeal to "the little man with the big heart, the uneducated fellow who so often knows more than the educated man," but when he began to illustrate tales about German women marrying Jews and bearing children with the mark of the alien race, it did not go down so successfully.
>
> Outlawing the Jews has not filled the cupboard. The same name called too many times loses its odor. Today Catholics are being accused of Bolshevism also and the

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[42] "Behind the Swastika," 28 October 1935, sec 2, p. 1.

> supposed Jewish connection with Communists loses its power as a great talking point for the Nazis. Apathy to the anti-Jewish campaigns is a symptom worth examining.[43]

There is far more of Herbst's work than can be reviewed or cited here. The Spanish articles were also powerfully written with a clean simple style. Like the German pieces, they were written for more moderate publications and offered little in the way of overtly radical commentary.[44] While the simple explanation might be that Herbst changed her style with her audience, it also is possible that the differences in style were a reflection of the changing nature of the stories and her changing reaction to them.

Herbst confessed to being invigorated by her reporting experience in Cuba. A fiercely autobiographical writer, Herbst's two fictional pieces based on the Cuban experience both draw the sharp contrast between uncertainty in her personl life and her sense of calm on the job.[45] She went, felt, recorded and wrote, first the non-fiction and then the fiction.

By the time she went to Germany, Herbst had put her own troubles behind her and the German story offered her another chance to brave the dangers of investigative reporting to get a story she believed needed to be reported. Everything she felt and

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[43] "Behind the Swastika," 1 November 1935, sec. 2, p.1.

[44] Josephine Herbst, "Spanish Village," Nation 145 (14 August 1937), 167-170; "Housekeeping under Fire," Woman's Day 1 (7 October 1937), 16-17; "Evening in Spain," Fight Against War and Fascism 5 (November 1937), 13, 30.

[45] Josephine Herbst, "The Enemy," Partisan Review 3 (October 1936): 7-12; Herbst, Rope of Gold, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company,Inc., 1939 repr, Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1984); and Langer, 182.

saw went into her stories for the Post. In her fiction she would not do a postmortem of her German experience.

In Cuba and Germany, Herbst was a lonely voice. A delegation of male writers arrived in Cuba to recap her trip only to be turned back. She was the only non-Cuban, and probably the only reporter, to be taken to the mountainous Realengo 18. In Germany, she asked to cover a story other journalists left alone.

In Spain everything was different. Far from alone, Herbst lived in a Madrid hotel surrounded by acquaintances, including her old friends Hemingway and Dos Passos. She was there, she suggested later, as much to experience Spain for herself as to cover it.

She wrote about the soldiers of the International Brigades and Spanish peasants coping in the midst of war parallel her memoir of the time. Her writing was still clear, still vivid, but there is less of it. It was her 1961 memoir, and not her stories that bore the force of her observations from Spain:

> Apart from a few news accounts, a few descriptive articles, I have never written anything about Spain. It had got locked up inside of me. . . . I can hardly think back upon Spain now without a shiver of awe; it is like remembering how it was to be in an earthquake where the ground splits to caverns, mountains rise in what was a plain. . . .I suspect it was the question of my own fate that took me to Spain as much as it was any actual convulsion going on in that country.[46]

Spain was her last venture as a reporter, but with Spain came also the end of her political activism. The forces of history

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[46] Herbst, "Starched Blue Sky of Spain," The Noble Savage 1 (1961), 76.

she had vowed to confront and record in 1930 in Kharkov had become too complicated, too contradictory to record.

CONCLUSION

As suggested, Herbst's choice of topics was clearly motivated by her politics. But while it was the force of her fascination with the forces of history that drove her journalism, its value lies in the record it provides of otherwise "missing moments" of history. When enough of her work has been read and analyzed it becomes clear that her reporting ability was due not to her Marxist insights as suggested, but rather to her storyteller's ability and innate curiosity.[47] It is a point she herself suggested in 1940:

> I am on a kind of pursuit, and neither a political slogan nor a statement would give the full answer. . . . I have to know things through my own skin and I have found some clues and have to learn them fully as I can. . . . Writing is not a substitution for life but an extension of it."[48]

Langer, though perhaps not an unbiased source said, of German series that it was "unrivaled in both depth and accuracy either by the journalists who were her contemporaries or by historians reconstructing later what was happening at the time."[49]

Critics' comments about her fiction also apply to her journalism. It has been noted that her employment of Marxist themes in her fiction was "circumspectly circumstantial."

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[47] Craig, "Social and Political Reporting," 75.
[48] Millett, Contemporary Authors, 389-309.
[49] Langer, Herbst, 213.

Nonetheless, it was forces of history as she saw them that shaped her fiction, not the forces she might have liked to have seen. In that, her work departs from the standard proletarian or socialist realist form.[50]

Herbst's fiction is worth reading for the same reasons her journalism is, reasons which are related to, but not solely determined by her politics. She wrote about the issues of pressing concern brought home to a generation of artists and writers by the Depression. If her politics can not be ignored, they but should be viewed in context as she always insisted.[51]

> For all the real influence of Marxism in her thought, her radicalism was and remained very much a homegrown, grassroots, feisty Midwestern rebelliousness: and it was, to the great benefit of her fiction, usually undogmatic and always grounded in human feeling despite the clarity and firmness of her intellectual convictions.[52]

She wrote with the same passion and intensity with which she approached her life. That her writing still has the power to transport and compel is perhaps the strongest argument that what she saw and what she wrote transcends time, form, and politics.

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[50]Millett, Contemporary Authors, 82; and, Langer, Afterword, Herbst, Rope of Gold, 444.
[51]Bevilacqua, Herbst, 9.
[52]Rideout, "Forgotten Images," 32.

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